

TUSKEGEE AIRMEN

Honoring “Red Tails” longstanding tradition at Randolph



This T-1 Jayhawk carries the red tail flash that signifies it as a Randolph aircraft assigned to the 99th Flying Training Squadron. The special marking honors the heritage of the Tuskegee Airmen of World War II fame. (Courtesy photo)



A composite bust of a WWII Tuskegee Airman sculpted by Clarence Shivers is currently on display at the 99th Flying Training Squadron. (Photo by Steve White)

By Bob Hieronymus
Wingspread staff writer

February is celebrated nation-wide as African American Heritage Month.

This is a celebration of more than passing interest at Randolph because there are two units with a direct lineage to Black military history. Randolph's 99th and 100th Flying Training Squadrons both trace their roots to the famous Tuskegee Airmen of World War II.

The 99th Pursuit Squadron (later designated the 99th Fighter Squadron) was activated on May 22, 1942, as the U. S. Army's only flying unit open to black men. The 332nd Fighter Group was activated later with three additional units, the 100th, 301st and 302nd Fighter Squadrons.

A segregated flight school for black pilots was established in conjunction with Tuskegee Institute, an Alabama college started in 1881 by the eminent black educator, Booker T. Washington.

Even though the 13th Amendment to the Constitution officially abolished slavery in this country in 1865, Jim Crow laws and pervasive segregation practices remained. Military policy in 1941 prevented black men from entering pilot training under the assumption they were somehow inferior to caucasians. Requests from leaders of the black community for the right to participate in the national war effort and pressures of wartime manpower requirements led to creation of this segregated program at Tuskegee Institute.

The Tuskegee program graduated 992 pilots between 1941 and 1946, about half of whom went on to fly fighter planes in the European Theater. The other half were trained for multi-engine aircraft, but the war was over before they reached their combat units.

The fighter pilots flew P-39, P-40, P-47 and P-51 aircraft, often escorting heavy bombers to and from their targets. The four squadrons flew 200 bomber escort missions over central and southern Europe with an unprecedented record of never having lost a

bomber they escorted to enemy fighter aircraft. The airplanes of the four fighter squadrons were marked with a distinctive red flash on their tails. They were often described by grateful bomber crews and by the enemy fighters as the “Red Tails.”

The outstanding record of the aircrews, reflected in the three Presidential Unit Citations they won during the war, was possible only because of the skill and dedication of the hundreds of support troops, almost all of whom were also black.

The magnificent performance of the 99th FS and the 332nd FG was part of the story behind Executive Order 9981 in which President Harry S. Truman directed the desegregation of the armed forces in 1948.

The squadrons were deactivated after the war and the history of the Tuskegee Airmen was almost forgotten. In 1988, the 99th squadron was reactivated at Williams Air Force Base, Ariz., as the 99th Flying Training Squadron, flying the T-38 trainer. When Williams AFB was closed in 1993, the squadron moved to Randolph and became part of the 12th Flying Training Wing.

The 100th Flying Training Squadron today is part of the 340th Flying Training Group, a Reserve unit headquartered here. It has the mission of providing the same training as Randolph's other pilot instructor training units.

The two squadrons work together seamlessly, said Lt. Col. Perry Peter, a T-1 flight commander in the 100th FTS. “We share office space, flying schedules, and the training syllabus. Sometimes we even forget we're two separate organizations.”

Today the 99th and 100th squadrons train T-1A instructor pilots who in turn train other pilots in refueling and heavy airlift aircraft. In addition, they provide initial flight training for navigators who will participate in low level airdrop and refueling missions.

The T-1A Jayhawk is a military version of the sleek Beechjet Model 400A. With its twin engines, the T-1 has the handling characteristics that help even relatively

inexperienced pilots learn how to teach other student pilots about flying the heavier airlift and refueling aircraft in the Air Force inventory.

“The instructor flight training program is designed for 72 training days,” said Lt. Col. James Garrett, 99th FTS commander. “It includes 15 hours in the T-96 simulator and 67 hours in the T-1A Jayhawk aircraft, in addition to more than 160 hours of classroom and computer-based instruction. We fly training missions that require formation flying, and simulate aerial refueling and air drop cargo delivery.”

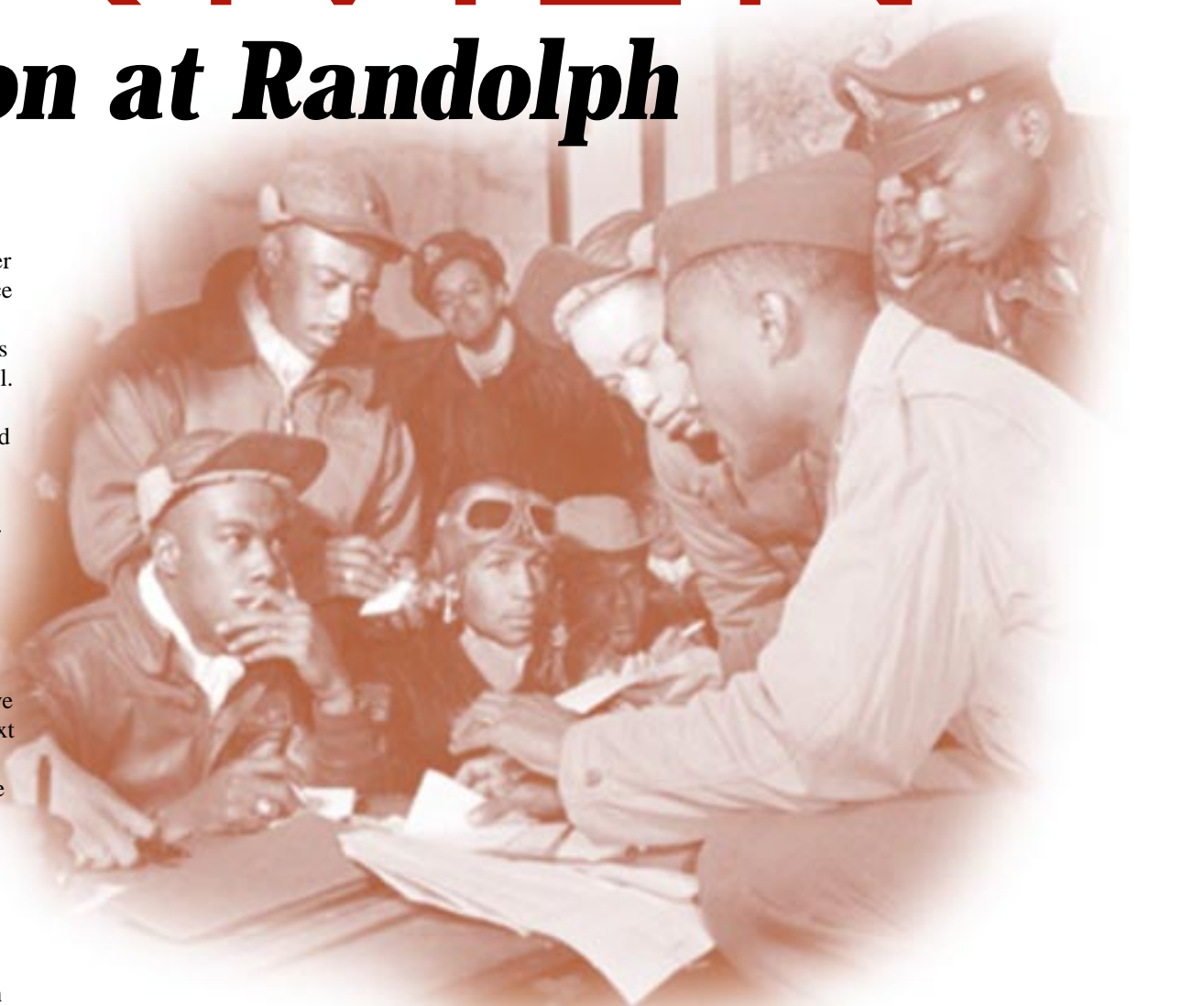
The unit turns out highly qualified instructor candidates, the colonel said, but students can expect to continue an intensive training regimen when they get to their next base and their mission aircraft. But then training is a way of life for everyone in the Air Force.

“Honoring the Tuskegee Airmen is an ongoing tradition for us,” said Colonel Garrett. “The 99th and 100th squadrons share in honoring this legacy by participating in the annual conventions of the Tuskegee Airmen and the Organization of Black Airline Pilots. We also fly our T-1s to Maxwell Air Force Base, Ala., where we give orientation rides to ROTC cadets from Tuskegee University.”

The 99th FTS's memorial hall features a new 35-foot long photographic mural showing the Tuskegee Airmen and their airplanes. Members of the Randolph multimedia center created the mural. It portrays highlights of black military aviation history and honors some of the squadron's heroes, Colonel Garrett said.

In addition, the squadron conference room is dedicated to the memory of Lt. Gen. Benjamin Davis, the first commander of the 99th Fighter Squadron in 1942. The room features displays of art honoring black aircrews.

“We're proud of what we do, just as the Tuskegee Airmen were justly proud of their accomplishments,” he said. “Their heritage of excellence is carried on by the aircrews who pass through our two organizations.”



Tuskegee Airmen take notes in a briefing before leaving on their next mission. They flew 200 bomber escort missions over central and southern Europe and never lost a bomber to enemy fire. (Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress)



This North American P-51 is painted in the colors of the 100th Fighter Squadron, the first of the Tuskegee Airmen's units. The red tail was the squadron's distinctive mark and was readily identified by both American bomber crews who depended on the fighter's protection and by the German fighters who fought them. (Courtesy photo)

Below is a portion of the photographic mural honoring the heritage of the Tuskegee Airmen. The complete mural, created by the 12th Communications Squadron Multi Media Center, is displayed in the 99th Flying Training Squadron. (Photo montage by Multi Media Center)

